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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000728

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SUBJECT: SECOND PHASE OF MAOIST COMBATANT REGISTRATION

DELAYED

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

Summary

¶1. (C) A Nepali journalist told the Ambassador April 5 that, on a recent tour of one of the Maoist cantonments, he had observed military training of new People's Liberation Army (PLA) recruits. He claimed that many of the PLA's most skilled combatants remained outside the UN-monitored camps; most were involved in the Young Communist League. John Norris, the political advisor to the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) told Emboff April 5 that the second phase of combatant registration had been delayed. The Maoists were demanding that the verification be tied to improvements in the camps and agreement on integration of combatants. The UNICEF country director expressed dismay April 5 that the process had not yet begun. On April 6, USAID-contracted peace facilitator Hannes Siebert told the Ambassador that the newly appointed Minister for Peace and Reconciliation was moving quickly to address the problems in the camps. Also on April 6, UMIN's military advisor confirmed to the DATT that the second phase of combatant verification had been postponed and detailed some of the reasons.

Journalist Describes Maoist Cantonment

¶2. (C) On April 5, a Nepali journalist, one of three headed to the United States on an International Visitor Program, described to the Ambassador what he had seen during a recent visit to one of the UN-monitored cantonments for People's Liberation Army (PLA) combatants. The morning consisted of several hours of military drill followed by military theory in the classroom. After volleyball in the afternoon, there was more military drill. When the journalist had asked a low-level PLA officer what he was doing, the officer had blithely replied that he was training new recruits. The journalist was not able to ask for more details because a more senior PLA officer arrived and shut the conversation down. The Nepali journalist claimed that most of the Maoists' skilled soldiers and military leaders remained outside the camps and had joined the Young Communist League.

Second Phase of Combatant Registration Delayed

¶3. (C) John Norris, who is the political advisor to the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), told Emboff April 5 that the second phase of registration of Maoist "combatants" had been delayed. He explained that the Maoists were demanding that poor conditions in the camps be improved first. The Maoists, he said, were also insisting that their partners in the Interim Government make commitments about integration of the "combatants" into the Government of Nepal (GON) security forces. Norris said that the Interim Task Force of ex-Ghurkas, which had helped with the first phase of registration, would be available for the second phase, but that international staff from the UN Development Program (UNDP) had the lead. When asked how long the process might be delayed, Norris had no answer. Gillian Mellsop, the UNICEF country director, informed Emboff the same day that she was dismayed the process had not yet begun. She said that UNICEF was eager to start winnowing out what she suspected were large numbers of children in the cantonments.

New Peace Minister Focused on Camp Conditions

¶4. (C) USAID-contracted peace facilitator Hannes Siebert informed the Ambassador August 6 that newly appointed Peace and Reconstruction Minister Ram Chandra Poudel had been briefed April 4 on the situation in the camps. His reaction had been to order a helicopter for the morning of April 5 to take him to visit two of the cantonments. Siebert said he had suggested Poudel take along Hsila Yami, the Maoist Minister for Physical Planning (and the wife of senior Maoist leader Dr. Baburam Bhattarai). When Poudel (and Yami) returned, Siebert reported Poudel told Ministry officials he

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was determined to fix the problems. The peace facilitator noted that one advantage of having the Maoists in the Interim Government was that they had now seen the government accounts and realized how little money the GON had. Siebert also complained with respect to the combatant registration process that the UNDP was still in the process of formulating the appropriate questions to ask combatants.

UN Military Advisor Confirms Delay

¶5. (C) UNMIN's military advisor, Gen. Jan Erik Wilhemsen, confirmed to the DATT April 6 that the second phase of arms registration had been postponed. He indicated that the Maoists wanted the Interim Government to approve the prior agreements which the Seven-Party and the Maoists had made with the UN about the monitoring of the management of arms and armies. Wilhemsen said the Maoists were insisting on concrete improvements in camp conditions before they would allow the second phase to proceed. They also wanted the Interim Government to agree now on a plan on what to do with those who were left in the camps after the second phase was over. One idea was for the combatants to become a border force. The Maoists were haggling as well over the standards UNDP planned to use to disqualify minors and new recruits. Gen. Wilhemsen stated that the Nepal Army would begin putting equivalent arms (number and type) under UN monitoring at Chauni starting the following week.

Comment

¶6. (C) It comes as no surprise to us that the Maoists are using their new clout as members of the Interim Government to slow roll the second phase of UN-monitored arms management while they attempt to fiddle with the rules. We will urge Prime Minister Koirala and UNMIN chief Ian Martin to resist Maoist efforts to delay or undermine the second phase. If the launch of the process continues to drag or if the process itself becomes tainted, we will speak out publicly and urge other members of the international community to do the same.

As the Nepali journalist told the Ambassador April 5, the Maoists are using the camps to train a new corps of recruits.

The sooner new recruits and children are evicted from the camps, the better. With respect to camp management, while camp conditions have indeed been poor, the Maoists themselves bear a large share of the responsibility. They refused to accept assistance from anyone but the GON; they presumably skimmed off a good portion of the GON assistance; and they inflated the numbers in the camps (and therefore the challenges in running the camps) through their recruitment drive last fall. Having Peace Minister Ram Chandra Poudel, who is also Acting Prime Minister in Koirala's absence, in charge of the camps, instead of Home Minister Sitaula, who was oddly indifferent to their poor state, should start to make a difference.

MORIARTY